A Good Reason
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A Good Reason

by baloobird

Summary

Tony doesn't say anything at first.

He's just standing in the doorway of his lab, watching in perplexion at what's before him.

His kid, this person who always does so much *good* in the world is doing something the older hero would never expect in a million years.

Peter is currently taking money out of his father figure's wallet.

Notes

Hey guys, this is my submission to the Friendly Neighborhood Fic Exchange!!

Trigger Warning: Starvation and Malnutrition due to Homelessness. Nothing graphic is shown or explained but I wanted to let you know to be on the safe side

Malya, I really hope you like this, I had so much fun with your prompt!!

Prompt used: Peter is in a bad situation and he decides to steal money from Tony who of course finds out and is very angry about it.

See the end of the work for more notes

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The mechanic doesn't know what to think, finding himself blinking rapidly because *obviously,* his eyes are playing tricks on him. Peter would never do something like this, especially since he's stopped these very same people on a number of patrols.

But here he is, the boy's trembling fingers are rifling through the cash before hurriedly grabbing several twenty-dollar bills, his back and shoulders tense with what the other assumes is fear.

Tony's mind goes blank, all of a sudden. How does he approach this? He can't simply *unknow* what he just saw with his own two eyes.

And then, there is the million-dollar question:

Why is Peter stealing money from him?

This is the first attempt, right? FRIDAY would've told him if otherwise.

Peter has had a million opportunities to steal, whether it be money, parts of the Iron Man suit, or other equipment that's worth more than NASA.

So why now?

The older man can feel his left hand start to tremble so he puts both of them in his jeans pockets. "Why stop there?" he says, guilt washing over him when the kid flinches at his voice, spinning around to face him while he tosses both the wallet and money to the side.

How did he not hear me, doesn't he have that super-hearing thing? Or was he that scared about stealing from me?

The armored hero slowly walks to the worktable. "If you're gonna steal from me, you might as well've taken all of it. Otherwise, you betrayed my trust for nothing."

"I-I," Peter starts, swallowing hard while his cheeks turn a shameful red hue, "I, uh—"

"C'mon, spit it out," Tony says, almost in a snap as a burning sensation forms in his chest. The hurt over what he's witnessed has registered and it's making his hands grip the bottoms of his pockets. "What the hell did I just see?"

He then takes a good look at his protege. The teen's own fingers are shaking despite holding them in a tight grip, his stare is locked onto his mentor's wallet, and he's taking such deep breaths as if

breathing will only be around for a limited time.

At least he looks like he regrets it.

Tony walks around the worktable, keeping an eye on the tyke while he thinks up what to say next. At hearing no response, he decides to repeat himself to stall. “Pete, what’s going on that you gotta stoop that low, huh?” he says, more concern in his voice this time.

The billionaire isn’t exactly *mad* at the poor guy but he has every right to be upset. If Peter was that desperate for money, why didn’t he just come to him about it?

Knowing him, if the kid had to resort to stealing, there's a reason for it.

A *good* reason.

Reason enough to make Tony worry.

Again, there is no answer from the kid but this time he shakes his head, his gaze now moved from the wallet to the tight grip on his hands.

“You know what this means, don’t you?” Tony asks, “What you just did?”

Only another shake of the boy's head is what he gets in return.

The older male sighs frustratingly, gripping onto the table so hard that his knuckles have turned white. “Kid, you betrayed my trust,” he says firmly, his own gaze locked on his mentee and wishing that the damn kid would just *look* at him. “I can’t leave you alone in my lab anymore, hell, I can’t leave you alone in my *house* anymore—”

“Yes, you can,” Peter interrupts with a whisper, “I’m, I’m-I’m sorry, I’m sorry—”

“‘Sorry’ isn’t gonna fix this—”

“It’s just a hundred dollars.” At long last, the teenager looks up at his father figure, his face showing pure panic but his eyes reveal a glint of anger. “I-I was even gonna pay you back.”

“And when would that be?” Tony retorts, his own voice rising in offense, “A million years from Sunday?”

The sixteen-year-old’s eyes narrow as he leans forward in his seat, fury damn near dripping off of him. “It’s just a hundred dollars,” he repeats, his tone too loud for his mentor’s liking, “A hundred bucks is just ‘chump change’ to you—”

“So that makes this *okay?”* Tony says, his voice matching the other’s while his own eyes narrow in anger, “Stealing’s no big deal when it’s someone who can afford it, right? Is that all you see me as, a human ATM?”

Peter falters, settling back into his chair. “No.”

“No, what?”

“I don’t see you like that,” the boy calls out, “If-If you really think I do, then…then what the fuck am I doing here?”

“Good question, huh? What *are* you doing here?”

The man's heart breaks at seeing his kid's face tense up in shock. "What?" the young genius asks, his tone dropped to just above a whisper, "What—I, what do you mean?"

"Does our relationship mean that little to you?" Tony's own voice drops at that, hurt getting in the way of the anger he thinks he's supposed to be feeling.

If the answer is "yes", does that mean that this whole thing with us has been a lie?

Did I put my trust in the wrong person?

This whole time, has this kid just been a money-hungry brat who's just gonna be around until he gets what he wants—

A sob breaks the mechanic out of his stupor.

"I'm sorry," Peter cries, keeping the same tone, "I'm…I-I'm so sorry, it's not what you think, I *promise* it's not what you think." He looks up at his hero, his eyes now glistening with tears, a few of which have started running down his cheeks. "Please don't leave."

"Then *talk to me,* kiddo," Tony says, leaning forward on the table's surface while the sound of his heartbeat throbs in his ears. He can feel his anxiety growing from both the risk of losing a friendship and at what the hell is eating at this kid. "I want to help you. I want you to have this money the *right* way, but I gotta know what's going on. I can't help you if you don't talk to me."

All Peter does in return is shake his head, using his shirtsleeve to wipe the tears from his eyes. "You-You wouldn't, um, you wouldn't understand."

"Try me."

Peter looks back up at the older genius, desperation evident in his eyes.

C'mon, kid, this isn't you, talk to me.

You've never had a problem talking to me before, why start now?

"I," the teen starts, "I-I can't."

"Why not?"

"'Cuz Aunt May doesn't want me to tell you."

The billionaire's eyebrows narrow in confusion. "If something's wrong, I want to help *both* of you."

"But—"

"No, no 'buts' this time. Whatever this is, I'm gonna fix it just *please* let me help you."

Tony surprised himself at that sentiment. He's hardly ever had to ask for something, let alone beg for it, but that's how much this kid means to him.

A measly hundred bucks isn't going to get in the way of that.

And that's what finally breaks the barrier, the unexpected grateful look coming from his kid. It spews out in a rush like his life depends on it.

“May’s sick.”

The man’s eyes widen in alarm. “Is she okay?”

Peter shakes his head, taking in another deep breath while he wraps his arms around his middle. “She’s been sick for a while.”

Tony’s mind instantly goes to worst-case scenarios as to what could have happened. Was May in a car accident? Does she have cancer or another illness that doesn’t provide an ideal recovery time? “How long is ‘a while’?” he asks.

His protege glances up at him before his gaze goes back to the worktable between them. “Since we got evicted,” he whispers, his tone the epitome of shame.

“You guys got *evicted?”* Tony says, leaning forward to give the tyke his undivided attention. He can feel goosebumps forming on his skin as he tries to make sense of what he just heard. Obviously, he heard wrong, right? If the Parkers actually got evicted, they would tell him, and he’d give them a place to stay before noon.

Before he can ask, his kid continues, “The hospital May worked at shut down and she, she lost her job. She told me, um, she told me there’s so much competition for nursing jobs now that it’s hard and, um,” again, he uses his shirtsleeve to catch any fallen tears, “The unemployment money doesn’t last that long, so uh, we got kicked out. And now we live in a homeless shelter.”

Tony is slack-jawed. He remembers the hospital shutdown from segments on the news, he even called May to ask how she’s doing and she lied right to his face by saying she already found another job.

And that was months ago.

Too many months ago.

“And you didn’t tell me?” he says, “Why didn’t you tell me, I could’ve helped you—”

“That’s why. Mr. Stark, we’re not a charity case.”

“Asking for help doesn’t make you a charity case, asking for help means you’re *asking for help.* I thought we were past this, *way* past this.”

“We thought that we’d just live in the shelter for a little while but, uh, it-it’s getting pretty bad.”

“When she got sick?”

Peter nods his head.

“What happened exactly?” Tony asks, “Did she get the flu but you couldn’t go to a doctor due to no insurance or what?”

Another sob escapes the teenager and he props his elbows on the worktable, proceeding to put his head in his hands. “It’s my fault,” he mumbles.

It takes everything in Tony not to roll his eyes. “C’mon, bud, I know you know that’s not true.”

“But it is, though.” The boy takes more deep breaths, along with a few sniffles suggesting he’s seconds away from bursting into tears. “If it wasn’t—if it wasn’t for Spider-Man, she’d be fine.”

“Huh? What does ‘Spider-Man’ have to do with this—”

Peter cuts him off with another sob, his breaths teetering as he wipes his tear-glistened face with his sleeve. “I have to eat more, remember?” he says, his voice more high-pitched due to the crying, “What the shelter gives you, I’m still hungry after I’m done.”

Oh, no.

This is not *going where I think it’s going.*

“So,” the spiderling adds on, “So May, she gives me most of her share. I-I keep saying ‘no’ but, but she always insists on it, she always says I need it more than she does.”

The poor kid breaks down, his shoulders shaking as his bawls echo through the lab. Again, he covers his face with his hands but his father figure gently grabs his wrists and pulls them away.

“Don’t you dare start feeling guilty—” Tony starts but his kid cuts him off.

“But I can’t help it,” the intern responds, his tone understandably raspy, “I, I-I-I get so hungry sometimes that I feel like I’m gonna pass out and I,” he pauses to sniffle, “I always end up taking it.” He looks up at the older man before putting his gaze back on the table’s surface. “I hate myself —”

“Stop it, stop it right now.” Tony lets go of his grip and hurries around the table, soon settling on a stool that’s next to his kid. He then grabs the other’s shoulder and gives it a heartfelt squeeze. “You did the right thing.”

“How? May’s sick now ‘cuz I’m so damn selfish—”

“But you might not be here right now if you didn’t listen to her.” Tony gives the tyke another squeeze of his shoulder. “Hey, look at me.”

At the shake of the other hero’s head, the billionaire tightens his grip. “C’mon, look at me, it’s alright.”

Peter wipes his face once again, hanging his head in shame before he lifts it to lock eyes with his mentor’s.

“That’s my boy,” Tony says with a gentle smile, cupping his cheek and wiping away a strewn tear, “Now listen to me when I tell you: *none* of this is your fault, you understand?”

“But May—”

“Was in an impossible situation, one that I wish I was aware of.” Tony starts ruffling his intern’s hair at the nape of his neck. “That was what the money was gonna be for, wasn’t it?”

The web-slinger nods his head. “I just want her to *eat something.* She looks horrible, I don’t know how to help her.”

“Well.” The older man gives him a light pat on the back. “You came to the right place.”

The boy’s red-rimmed eyes bug out in shock. “You don’t mean—”

“What homeless shelter were you staying at?” Tony lets go of his grip and pulls his phone out of his back pocket, readying to alert medbay of a new patient.

“Um, uh it’s one near where we used to live, I don’t know the name of it.”

“Eh, they’ll find it.”

“Who?”

“The EMTs I just sent out.”

“What?!” Peter leans forward, grabbing his hero’s shirt by its sleeve. “Aunt May’s gonna be mad —”

“Then when she gets better, I’ll let her kick my ass, how ‘bout that,” Tony says with a smirk, “At this point, I don’t care if May doesn’t approve. I can’t just sit here and not do anything.”

After what feels like a million years, the mechanic finally sees a smile break out across the teen’s face, grunting at the unexpected force of Peter giving him a hug. “Thank you,” the young hero whispers, “I’m sorry about the money, I really wasn’t—”

Tony cuts him off with a light shush, wrapping his arms around his kid while giving him a kiss atop his head. “Nothing happened, kid, nothing happened.”

-

May looks the worst Tony has ever seen her.

Her complexion is white as a sheet, her eyes are sunken in, and she’s so thin that her skin looks almost detached from her bones.

And this all happened in a matter of months. Tony shivers at the thought of Peter going through with his plan and he was none the wiser.

The armored hero looks on from the doorway of the older Parker’s hospital room, not wanting to intrude on the moment she is currently having with her nephew. He sees the love in May’s eyes when she moves a curl away from her kid’s face, the way she soothes him when Peter apologizes for the dozenth time about coming clean.

She would’ve kept doing this right to her grave.

May takes notice of Tony and beckons him over, grabbing his hand when he sits across from the teen. “You’re in big trouble, mister,” she says, a smirk forming to show the statement is with mirth.

“You being around to give me the punishment shows I made the right decision,” Tony replies with a smile. He gives their grip a heartfelt squeeze while being mindful of the wires that are connected to the back of her hand. “How’re you feeling?”

“Oh, just peachy,” May retorts, “But thank you.” She turns back to her nephew. “And thank *you* for doing what I was too stubborn to do.”

“I know you didn’t want help—” Peter starts but his guardian cuts him off.

“But I needed it. What made you finally say something?”

Peter takes a glance at his father figure but his gaze goes to the sterile white hospital sheets. “I—”

“He was worried about you,” Tony interjects, his eyes locking onto his intern’s, “And who can

blame him?" The two heroes share a smile, the younger's as a form of a "thank you" while the elder's is one of understanding, to silently let Peter know that what happened earlier won't be brought up ever again.

"Why didn't you want me to know?" the billionaire adds on, turning back to May.

"It's a lot of things," she starts, her voice lowering exponentially, "I've never liked asking for help, and I just knew I could fix this somehow." She gives her charge's hand a fragile squeeze. "No matter what happened, we could always fix it, right?"

"Always," Peter whispers.

His aunt continues, "But I was also scared."

"Of what?" Tony asks, "May, it's me, you have nothing to be scared of—"

"Tony, you've never had to ask for financial help." May gives him a knowing smile. "You don't know the judgment that comes with that, the debt, and I'm not just talking about money debt. I didn't want money to get in the way of this, of *us."* She gives his grip another squeeze. "Like right now with all of this, I don't know how I'm gonna repay you—"

"You're not going to."

"But that's not fair to you."

"The only thing I want is for you to get better. You're not getting any sort of bill after all is said and done, what kinda person does that make me?"

"But—"

"I'm not doing this to make myself look good. This isn't a charity, I'm doing any sort of press shit. This is me helping out a friend." Tony smiles in return. "That is, if she'll let me."

May rolls her eyes. "Don't think you're getting out of this scot-free now."

"Oh, I know better than that." The billionaire's face falls. "I just hate that it got this bad."

"I didn't have a choice. If you were in my shoes, what would you have done?"

With one look at his kid, the answer is obvious. "The same."

Peter's eyes widen. *"Mr. Stark—"*

"I said what I said." The older genius turns back to May, giving her hand one more squeeze before letting go. "I'm gonna go get your rooms ready."

"We're staying here?" the teen asks.

"Duh," Tony says with an amused grin, "You really think I'm gonna let you guys go back there?"

"Tony, this is too much—" May starts but the other adult cuts her off.

"Believe me, it's not. You're gonna need some time to get your strength back and a homeless shelter is not the place to do so. Also, I have a proposition for you."

"And what's that?" the older Parker replies with a snort.

"Well, one of my nurses just put in his two-week notice."

A chuckle escapes the boy. "Why do I have a feeling that no one actually quit?"

"You don't believe me?" His father figure puts a hand on his chest in mock offense.

"I know you too well."

"Me too," May chimes in, "Tony, I'll find a job—"

"And you did. Right here." Said man gestures to the hospital room they're in. "Just until you get on your feet. Same for staying here, just until you're able to get an apartment."

May takes a second to let everything sink in, her eyebrows narrowing in concentration. "Are you sure about this?" she asks, "I, I don't want us to overstay our welcome."

"That's not possible." Tony takes another look at his protege. "You guys stay as long as you like, seriously. Selfishly, I could also use the company."

"Please, May?" Peter asks, his thumb rubbing over her fragile knuckles, "I think you'll like it here."

With a defeated sigh, May gives in, a disbelieving beam spreading across her face. "Fine. But the *second* you get sick of us, Tony, you better make us leave."

Never.

"Deal."

-

Tony was dreading this.

Before he even walks into the kitchen one Saturday morning, he hears the Parkers discussing apartments, which location is best in Queens and with what amenities.

"May, this one's got a pool," Peter says. The older man peeks around the entrance of the hallway to see them at the kitchen counter, staring long and hard at the laptop in front of May that's showing them a possible new home.

"Peter, we're not judging a place solely based on a pool—"

"But it's a *nice* pool."

"Oh my God, what am I gonna do with you?"

I could get us a nice pool.

Tony cringes at the weird feelings flooding through him. This was never going to be a permanent thing, all of this should have come as no surprise.

In the four months since May was taken to medbay, she has recovered tremendously. Thanks to a high-protein diet and physical therapy, she is back on her feet better than ever, and her new position in medbay has fit her like a broken-in baseball glove.

For the past four months, the Parkers have been living with Tony in the penthouse.

For the past four months, those empty spare rooms have been filled by loved ones.

And for the past four months, Tony has gotten used to it.

The realization hits him as he walks past them to the half-full coffee pot, still hot thanks to May keeping the coffeemaker on after she finished her share.

This isn't going to last forever.

Sometime soon, Tony will be the only person living in his house again. Sure, Rhodey, Pepper, and Happy stop by on occasion but by the time he goes to sleep that night, he's the only one in the dark.

Hearing footsteps, running facets, and sounds of cereal hitting bowls are now associated with a sort of comfort, one that Tony never knew he needed. He likes those little reminders that tell him he's not alone, feeling alleviated at seeing his loved ones so relaxed because they're *home.*

But that's the thing:

Do *they* consider this home?

Do they want to leave? Is Tony not able to read the signals? Are they counting down the days until they can get out of this "hellhole"?

Okay, my place isn't that bad, is it?

"Mornin'," both Parkers say in passing, snapping the man out of his stupor. May and her nephew are still focused on the laptop, no doubt going through a million different floorplans to try and pick out which one is best for them.

While he downs his coffee, the billionaire gets a good look at them without moving his head.

They look excited.

Did I do something wrong?

"Mornin'," Tony mumbles in reply, "Whatcha up to?"

"May's getting ready to schedule apartment tours," Peter says, *"And* we're gonna look at one that has a pool—"

His aunt cuts him off. "We're *not* gonna look at a place just because it has a pool—"

"But what if the place is like, amazing or something?"

Tony snorts as he takes another swig of coffee. "There's tons of pools around, kiddo."

"But we could live right *next* to one, though."

The armored hero sees May shake her head, giving the other adult an amused smile. "Anyway," she starts, "We're shooting to be out your hair in the next couple months or so."

Tony's heart drops to the floor.

So they do *hate it here.*

I wish they said something sooner.

"Y'know, um," he says, turning around to get another cup of coffee, "There's no rush or-or anything. You can stay as long as you need to."

Or forever.

That works too.

"Tony, you've been amazing," May says, "But I think it's obvious that we've overstayed our welcome. Surely, you're sick of us at this point."

"No, I'm not," the mechanic blurts out, wincing at how desperate that sounded. He turns around with his mug in hand, trying not to cringe at the surprised looks his guests are sporting.

"I mean," he says, praying that he's keeping his composure, "If you guys are under the impression that you're burdening me here or something, that couldn't be farther from the truth."

"Really?" Peter says, "I, I know I get annoying sometimes—"

"Getting annoyed at you for scratching a suit part doesn't mean I want you to leave. Mistakes happen, so what?"

"Tony?" May says, "Do you *not* want us to leave?"

She's too smart for her own good.

"Um." Tony puts down his mug, his mind going in too many directions to focus on drinking the rest of his beverage. "I mean, if you guys *want* to leave, I'm certainly not gonna stop you. But, if you're only leaving because you think I don't want you here, um, that's not true in the slightest." He then concludes, taking a deep breath to work up the courage, "It'd be great if you stayed."

The Parkers look at each other in surprise. "See? I told you," Peter states, giving his guardian a mile-wide grin. "Mr. Stark loves us."

"I—" May cuts herself off with a scoff, looking up at the older male, "You really wouldn't mind if we stayed?"

The hope in her eyes is what finally gets Tony to relax.

They've wanted to stay this whole time but they thought I was getting sick of them.

Boy, did we get our wires crossed or what?

"Not a bit," the scientist says with a smile, "Not one damn bit."

"Well." May closes her laptop and pushes it off to the side. "That settles it then." She gives her nephew a light ruffle of his hair before turning to his father figure. "Thank you. So, I expect that we're gonna have a little talk about rent and utilities—"

"May, don't worry about that—"

"I'm not about to have us stay here for free. I can't in good conscience do that, I should've been doing that this whole time. So, we're *definitely* having that conversation."

The billionaire turns to his kid. "There's nothing I can say that's gonna change her mind, is there?"

“Nope.” Peter’s cheeks turn a light shade of pink. “I’m really excited that I’m, uh, gonna be seeing you all the time and stuff. I was really gonna miss you when we moved.”

Now it’s Tony’s turn to ruffle the tyke’s hair. “Me too, kiddo, me too.”

You have no idea.

End Notes

Thank you for reading and thank you cold_nights_summer_days and doctornineandthreequarters for putting together another fun exchange!!

I'm also on tumblr!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!